



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **North Dakota Department of Health Reminds Residents to Use Care While Cleaning to Avoid Hantavirus Disease**

BISMARCK, N.D. – With the Memorial Day weekend approaching, many people will be cleaning cabins, sheds and other buildings that have been closed for the winter. The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reminds residents to protect themselves against hantavirus, a viral infection associated with exposure to areas where rodents have been present.

“Hantavirus exposure can lead to hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS), which is a viral infection that causes severe lung disease. Infected rodents, primarily deer mice, spread the virus in their urine, droppings and saliva. The virus is transmitted to people when they breathe in air contaminated by the virus, and on rare occasions it can be transmitted through an infected rodent bite,” according to Michelle Feist, Epidemiology and Surveillance Program Manager with the Department of Health’s Division of Disease Control.

If you will be cleaning areas that may have contained rodents, NDDoH recommends the following steps to avoid hantavirus infection:

- Ventilate the space by opening the doors and windows for 30 minutes before cleaning
- Do not stir up dust by sweeping or vacuuming up droppings, urine or nesting materials
- Wear gloves and use disinfectant when cleaning up dead rodents or their urine, droppings and nests
- Saturate material with disinfectant for five minutes before removal
- Mop floors and clean countertops, cabinets and drawers with disinfectant
- Use a commercial disinfectant or a bleach solution made with one part bleach and nine parts water

Symptoms of HPS usually begin two to three weeks after infection. Early symptoms commonly include fever, muscle and body aches, fatigue, headache, dizziness, chills, nausea and vomiting. The illness worsens within a short period of time to include coughing and shortness of breath as lungs fill with fluid.

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Thirteen cases of HPS have been reported to the Department of Health since 1993, when the virus was first recognized in the United States. Seven of the 13 reported cases were fatal. Two cases were reported in 2014, one of which was fatal. Nationally, through December 31, 2013, 637 cases have been reported with 36 percent resulting in death. About 75 percent of all cases in the U.S. have occurred in residents living in rural areas.

For more information, contact Michelle Feist, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

*Please note:*

*A fact sheet containing important precautions to minimize the risk of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome infection is available at [www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf](http://www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf).*

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